

Come Pray With Me
LENTEN PRAYER GUIDE 2023



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Sunday, April 9

He is risen! He is risen indeed!

Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: "I have seen the Lord!" And she told them that he had said these things to her. John 20:18

The Attributes of God

- God is holy. *But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: 'Be holy, because I am holy.'* (1 Peter 1:15-16).
- God is good. *Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the one who takes refuge in him. Psalm 34:8*
- God is loving. *For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. John 3:16*
- God is merciful. *Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. Hebrews 4:16*
- God is all-powerful. *Sovereign LORD! You have made the heavens and earth by Your great power. Nothing is too hard for You! Jeremiah 32:17*
- God is all-knowing. *You have searched me, Lord, and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. Psalm 139:1-2*
- God is faithful. *Your lovingkindness, O Lord, extends to the heavens, Your faithfulness reaches to the skies. Psalm 36:5*
- God is eternal. *Lord, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations. Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the whole world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God. Psalm 90:1-2*
- God is unchanging. His character never changes. God is dependable. His purposes are unfailing, and his promises are eternal. *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. Hebrews 13:8*

Saturday, April 8

Now Thomas (also known as Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!"

But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe."

A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe."

Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!" John 20:24-28

When you pray and you do not receive the answers that you expect it is natural to want to know "why?" God invites you to bring your doubts and confusion to him. You don't need to package your prayers so that they are acceptable to God. Express your feelings with honesty and then give God time to work. The problem is not what you pray in times of disappointment and confusion. The problem occurs only if you choose not to engage in prayer at all. Start where you are. Say what you think. Wait to hear the Lord's response to you. He is not surprised by your feelings. Like the Apostle Thomas, when you express your honest doubts in the darkness you will end up declaring your faith in the light.

Have you ever prayed with honesty in the face of disappointment or loss? What is necessary for you to decide to be honest before God?

Come Pray with Me: A Guide to Prayer During the Season of Lent

Lent is a time of repentance, fasting and preparation for the coming of Easter. It is a time of self-examination and reflection. We have prepared this prayer guide to encourage you to spend time in conversation and communion with God.

How it works:

There is a brief Scripture reference and a devotional for each day, Monday through Saturday. Each entry also contains a question for you to consider or a suggestion to apply to your time of prayer. We hope that this guide will help you center your heart and mind of what God is doing in your life, in our church, and in the world around us. Each Sunday, you will find a listing of the opportunities for prayer, service and fellowship for the week.

Come pray with us. Pray corporately. Pray privately. Walk and pray. Keep a gratitude journal. Pray in the morning, or at lunch, or at the end of the day. The opportunities are endless, but a life of prayer will require a commitment of your time and attention.

Jesus stands at the door knocking. For the next forty days will you make prayer a priority? Will you let him come in?

Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me. Revelation 3:20

Wednesday, February 22

One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples." Luke 11:1

The disciples walked with Jesus and watched him closely as he taught and worked miracles and proclaimed the kingdom of God. They were with him when he addressed the challenges made by the religious leaders. They were present when he ate dinner with the outcast and the poor. They saw Jesus touch lepers and welcome sinners. These followers must have known that the source of his love, his wisdom, and his power was his life of prayer. They were humble enough to ask Jesus to teach them to pray.

Will you enter this season of Lent with a heart that is open to all that the Spirit might reveal to you about your life as an individual and as a part of the community of faith? Humble yourself and say: "Lord, teach me to pray."

Friday, April 7

Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." And they divided up his clothes by casting lots. Luke 23:34

If you choose to hold a grudge against another it's as though you have put out the welcome mat and invited Satan to stay for tea. The Apostle Paul tells the Christians in Ephesus to patch up disagreements as soon as possible.

"In your anger do not sin" Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold. Ephesians 4:26-27

You can't help the anger that comes when someone hurts you, but you can choose to get rid of that anger as soon as possible. If you sit for a while in your anger, you will soak in the misery. Sooner or later, you will find that bitterness has seeped into your heart.

The antidote to bitterness is forgiveness. In the biblical sense, forgiveness includes the idea of a debt being eliminated as though it never existed. When a person forgives, he relinquishes the right to retribution or payment of any kind.

The act of forgiveness does not necessarily put the relationship back together again. One person cannot bring reconciliation on their own, but one person can forgive and open the door to reconciliation.

It's what we see demonstrated by Jesus as he hung on the cross. In the most of his greatest humiliation and pain he asked the Father to give his forgiveness to those with evil intent and blood stained hands. Gordon McDonald says "Jesus did not wait until bitterness crippled his soul. He chose to proactively forgive (or pray for their forgiveness). He chose to remain the sinless Christ who could die for the sins of the world."

On this day when Christians reflect on the ultimate sacrifice that brought forgiveness and life, may you consider who you need to forgive. Ask God to give you the willingness to offer the same forgiveness that you have received.

Thursday, April 6

And he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, and knelt down and prayed, saying, "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done." Luke 22:41-42

In his book *Talking in the Dark*, Steve Harper addresses the significance of prayer even when or especially when life is filled with loss and suffering. He points out that one word made all the difference in the prayer that Jesus prayed in Gethsemane. "Nevertheless" took reality into full account. Jesus knew the brutality and horror of the cross, yet in his surrender to God the circumstances would not have the last word. When Jesus said, "nevertheless" he was saying that evil would not win.

When you face the most difficult times in your life, when the losses are the deepest and the pain seems to be more than you can stand, surrender your will to the Father. A "nevertheless" will remain inside of you. When you pray a "nevertheless" prayer, you declare that you will not be defined by evil but by God.

Jesus trusted that God would have the last word in his resurrection which gave him the faith to accept the Father's plan. Because of the sacrifice of Jesus, you have that same expectation. In the face of suffering which you may not understand, echo the words of your Savior, "Nevertheless, not my will but yours be done."

Thursday, February 23

Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them pray. Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise. Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective. James 5:13-16

Prayer was God's idea, and he intends for your communication with him to be a part of every aspect of your life. This is good news because it means that despite your questions about how prayer works, you can be confident that it really does matter. Pete Greig says that God has designed the human will to work in partnership with God's will. God has given prayer to bestow upon his creatures the "dignity of causality." God allows your prayers to move his heart and his hand.

What are you praying about now? Are you aware that you are partnering with God as you pray over the needs in your life and in the world around you?

Friday, February 24

Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. 1 John 4:7-8

Dallas Willard says that learning to recognize the voice of God is part of life with God. Conversation with God doesn't happen in a vacuum; rather, it occurs in the context of a loving relationship with God. Your love for your Heavenly Father will grow as you spend time talking and listening to him. You will find that you will recognize the love that God has for you as you dialogue with him throughout the day. Your prayer life will become passionate instead of perfunctory. Love is both the fuel for and the result of your communication with God.

Why is love central to a life of prayer?

Wednesday, April 5 continued

You cannot expect to live with this kind of humility in your own strength, but when you spend consistent time in God's Word and in prayer you will be both inspired and equipped to live the blessed life that Jesus invites you to enjoy.

How does your time in prayer shape your desire to serve?

Wednesday, April 5

It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them. John 17:1-5,12-17

On this holy occasion, Jesus takes the towel and the basin and does what needs to be done. The Savior of the world performs the task of the lowest servant and in so doing foreshadows the giving of his life on the cross.

In this moment recorded by John, readers witness the depth of the love of Jesus has for his disciples. This love that will ultimately be displayed when he gives his life for the sins of the world.

In this act of humility, Jesus reveals his love and establishes the standard by which his followers will live. He instructs those who love him to demonstrate that love in service to others. Then he says something remarkable. You will be blessed in the serving.

Jesus calls his followers to a life where position and power are put aside for the privilege of washing another's feet. Jesus says that there is a blessing that comes to his followers when they embrace this kind of humility.

Saturday, February 25

Then John gave this testimony: "I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. And I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.' I have seen and I testify that this is God's Chosen One."

The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, "Look, the Lamb of God!"

When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus. Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, "What do you want?" John 1:32-38

The very first thing Jesus asked his soon to be disciples was "What are you looking for?" Of course, he knew the inner workings of their hearts and minds, but he wanted them to examine their desires.

Don't be afraid of your desires. Your deepest needs will take you to Jesus. As you spend time with him, you will find that your Savior will give you exactly what you need. As you bring God the desires of your heart you discover that God meets you where you are. In fact, the deepest longings of your innermost being are an indication that God is already at work in your life. The Holy Spirit will fan the small flame of desire motivating you to "keep company with Jesus." As you talk to God about the needs in your life you discover that what you really want is more of him. This hunger and thirst for God is the foundation of all discipleship. When you want to be with Jesus, the transformation will begin.

How might the awareness of your deepest desires propel you to spend time in prayer?

Sunday, February 26

Prayer Focus this Week: God's Church

Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." Matthew 16:16-19 (NIV)

God's church needs our prayers. The power of prayer is how we fight the enemy surrounding us. We are a people called to pray and there is power when we are in one accord. May we offer together this prayer today. Then each day this week offer the breath prayer below.

Most merciful Father,
send Your heavenly blessings upon this Your Church,
that all its members may dwell together in unity and love.
Keep far from us all self-will and discord.
Endue Your pastors with righteousness,
and enable them faithfully to fulfill their ministry,
to bring again the outcasts, and to seek the lost.
And grant to us so to receive their ministrations,
and to use Your means of grace,
that in all our words and deeds
we may seek Your glory and the advancement of Your kingdom;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.
(THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER, U.S.A., 20TH CENT., ALT.)

Breath Prayer: Lord Jesus, I believe in You, Son of the living God.

Opportunities for prayer, study, service, and fellowship:

- Corporate Prayer Service & Walk: Tuesday, February 28th at noon in Walden Chapel.
- Lectio Divina class for youth and adults, Wednesday, March 1st at 6:00 PM in Ford Hall.
- Strive to Thrive: Serve a meal to families pursuing financial self-sufficiency, Thursday, March 2nd. Contact Christy Winkel for details.

Tuesday, April 4

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us. Romans 5:1-5

Richard Foster has said, "To pray is to change." When you open yourself to God you will find that you begin to see the world from God's perspective. His thoughts become your thoughts. His loves become your loves. His purposes become the desire of your heart. In this way, a life of prayer is a journey of transformation. When you pray, there will be unexpected revelations about God and profound discoveries about your own life. Most significantly, you will have an increased experience of God's love which will result in an increased capacity to offer love to others. The Spirit will pour God's love into your heart and that love will flow out into the lives of those for whom you pray.

Thank God for his love and ask him to make you aware of his presence throughout your day. May the love of God flow from you into the lives of those you encounter.

Monday, April 3

Jesus entered the temple courts and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves. "It is written," he said to them, "My house will be called a house of prayer, but you are making it 'a den of robbers.'" Matthew 21:12-13

When Jesus turned over the tables, he quoted from the book of Isaiah where it was written, "My house shall be called a house of prayer." God promised that when the Messiah would come there would be a place for the outcast and the impoverished to worship God. No one would be excluded. All would be welcome to worship and pray. On the Monday of Holy Week, Jesus arrived on the scene and began to make God's expectations clear to those who had become confused. Can you imagine the reaction of the religious leaders? It was not that the furniture had been rearranged but rather that their authority had been challenged. Jesus spoke and acted with the confidence of God.

We began our focus on prayer in February with PRAY24 when we invited the church to pray in succession, an hour at a time. Many of you chose to participate and we were able to extend the opportunity. But PRAY24 was just the beginning. At First Methodist Church, we want to create a space where prayer occurs not only in our worship services but throughout the week in small groups and Bible studies, in meetings, in times of service and fellowship. There is nothing more important to the life of our church than our devotion to prayer. As we foster the environment of prayer, we are inviting each member and guest to experience prayer as a way of life.

Will you allow Jesus to rearrange some things in your life in order to make room for prayer?

Monday, February 27

Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Acts 2:41-42

Prayer was a vital part of the life of the early church. Throughout the book of Acts we read accounts of prayer meetings where the church gathered and cried out to God on behalf of other Christians. The need for this kind of intercession has not lessened and neither have the beautiful results. Here is a recent example of what happens when Christians unite their voices in prayer:

Seventeen Ohio based missionaries who were doing humanitarian work in Haiti were captured in October 2021 and held for ransom. A few weeks later, at two separate times, five of the hostages were released. There were 12 remaining including a baby and a three-year-old child. After being held by their captors for two months, the hostages made a daring nighttime escape.

When they sensed the timing was right, the hostages pried open a door and walked single file through the dark night even though there were numerous guards close by. They walked ten miles before dawn broke, following the stars and a landmark mountain that they recognized in the distance.

Throughout the world, Christians had prayed for their release. The director of Christian Aid Ministries who sponsored these missionaries thanked the news media for sharing the story throughout the world because this allowed Christians to pray.

Have you joined with other Christians throughout the world, interceding for a person or a group of people in crisis? Consider offering regular prayers on behalf of those Christians who are being persecuted because of their faith in Christ. Remember the biblical examples of intercession, but also reflect on the recent accounts of God's deliverance. You are more likely to pray when you believe your prayers really matter to the outcome of events.

Tuesday, February 28

On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them. When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. "Sovereign Lord," they said, "you made the heavens and the earth and the sea, and everything in them. Acts 4:23-24

After the ascension of Jesus, the religious leaders who had been responsible for his crucifixion were now concerned about the influence of the disciples. They had arrested Peter and John and threatened them with death in order to prevent them from continuing to give witness to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Upon their release, the two disciples went to the church who had gathered in prayer. They gave a report of what had happened to them, including the very real threats that had been made on their lives.

The verses you read today are the response of those Christians. Notice that they immediately cry out to God. Before they ask for a thing, they remind themselves of the sovereign power of God.

Victory comes when we recognize that God is omnipotent. God can do what he intends, and all that God intends is good. Ask God to show you how he is working in your life and the world around you.

Sunday, April 2

Prayer Focus this Week: Nature/Play and Friends

"By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done." Genesis 2:2-3 (NIV)

Chuck Swindoll reminds us in his book **Strengthening Your Grip** that leisure and enjoyment of life is essential to our physical, emotional, and mental health. He even suggests that our best work may be done when we are at our leisure being creative while doing things we love to do. We sometimes forget to enjoy the gift of life God has given us and to thank Him for the ones He has placed in our life to enjoy it with.

Breath Prayer: Lord Jesus, thank you for the gift of life and those I "do life" with.

Opportunities for prayer, study, service, and fellowship:

- Palm Sunday Musical Celebration 8:30 AM and 10:30 AM, Sanctuary.
- Enjoy a prayer walk in nature or a location where you like to play and find rest. Invite the friends you "do life" with to come along with you. Pray for one another.
- Holy Week Services: Monday April 3rd through Friday, April 7th, First Presbyterian Church at 12:15 PM.
- Maundy Thursday Service: April 6th at 6:30 PM, Sanctuary.
- Children's Easter egg hunt, Saturday, April 8th, 10:00 AM. Location: 610 Byron Plantation Road.

Saturday, April 1

The Lord himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.”
Deuteronomy 31:8

Have you ever considered that prayer will prepare you to face the challenges that are sure to come?

Dallas Willard says in his book **Renovation of the Heart** that we often focus on the wrong thing. What happens to us is not the issue. It's how well we are prepared to face the situation that determines our experience. "A carefully cultivated heart will, assisted by the grace of God, foresee, forestall, or transform most of the painful situations which others stand before like helpless children, saying 'Why?'"

You can't always determine what happens to you, but you can choose how you will respond. The time you spend with God in the good times will give you the courage and strength you need to stand when you face the challenges of life.

When you pray, ask the Holy Spirit to work in your life to produce the strength that you will need for the future.

Wednesday, March 1

*Lord, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!
You have set your glory
in the heavens.
Through the praise of children and infants
you have established a stronghold against your enemies,
to silence the foe and the avenger.
When I consider your heavens,
the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars,
which you have set in place,
what is mankind that you are mindful of them,
human beings that you care for them?
You have made them a little lower than the angels
and crowned them with glory and honor.
You made them rulers over the works of your hands;
you put everything under their feet:
all flocks and herds,
and the animals of the wild,
the birds in the sky,
and the fish in the sea,
all that swim the paths of the seas.
Lord, our Lord,
how majestic is your name in all the earth! Psalm 8:1-9*

In the verses we read yesterday, we saw that the church's first response to fear was to focus on the sovereignty of God. The church realized what the psalmist knew: God reveals his power in the world that he has made.

Contemplate the works of God and you will be reminded of the majesty of the Creator. This realization of who God is will strengthen your faith and give you the confidence to bring your requests before the throne of God.

Thursday, March 2

You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David:

*“Why do the nations rage
and the peoples plot in vain?
The kings of the earth rise up
and the rulers band together
against the Lord
and against his anointed one.*

Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen. Acts 4:25-26

When the church hears about the threats of the same religious leaders who had conspired against Jesus, they consciously focus their attention on the Word of God. These are lines composed by David celebrating the victory God will have over the kings and powers of this world. The church also looked back at the recent crucifixion of Jesus. This was the darkest time of their lives. They recognize now what they did not see then. At the time of the crucifixion, it seemed that evil had won. In truth God was in control of everything that happened.

If God was in control of the death of Jesus, God is also in control of the threats against his disciples. “Nothing is too big for God to handle” might sound like a religious cliché, but the early church staked their lives on its truth. Will you?

Friday, March 31

About noon the following day as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. He became hungry and wanted something to eat, and while the meal was being prepared, he fell into a trance. He saw heaven opened and something like a large sheet being let down to earth by its four corners. It contained all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles and birds. Then a voice told him, “Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.”

“Surely not, Lord!” Peter replied. “I have never eaten anything impure or unclean.”

The voice spoke to him a second time, “Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.” Acts 10: 9-15

Acts, chapter 10 records the story of the gospel moving to the Gentiles. God intended to use Simon Peter to proclaim the message of Jesus Christ to a Roman centurion, but before this could happen Peter had to have a change of heart. God visits Peter during his time of prayer and reveals to him that the Gospel is for Jew and Gentile alike. God will send Peter into uncharted territory with his message of salvation.

When you spend time with God you can expect similar things to happen in your life. The Spirit of God will reveal a person you need to love or something about yourself that you had not known. Sometimes the Spirit will send you to do his work in unexpected places. Don't be afraid of the new or the unknown. God was with Peter, and God will be with you. And like Peter, when you follow the Spirit into the world, you will witness the display of the overwhelming power of God.

As you pray, be open to the prompting of the Spirit. Ask God what unexpected assignments he has for you today.

Thursday, March 30

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered."

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Romans 8:35-39

Christians don't live in denial. They recognize the suffering in the world and the suffering that is a part of their own lives. But neither do Christians give up hope. They hold onto their faith in Jesus Christ, the Savior who will return to judge the world and make all things new. Christians look forward to the time when there will be no more tears even while they cope with the ordinary pain and problems that plague the rest of society.

Christians know that following Jesus does not protect them from all harm, and they understand that prayer does not remove the problems from their lives. Still, they pray. Prayer reminds them of who God is and his overwhelming love for them. Prayer makes it possible to stand firm and to live with joy even when the rest of the world seems to be falling apart.

What burdens are you carrying now? How might consistent, fervent prayer bring you hope?

Friday, March 3

Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus." Acts 4:23-30

Because the church remembered the sovereignty of God, they were willing to trust him with their lives. What the church did not do: they did not complain about their circumstances or call down fire from heaven on their enemies. Instead of asking God to remove them from these life-threatening circumstances, they prayed for boldness. This boldness is what got Peter and John into trouble in the first place (Acts 4: 13) but it didn't seem to matter. The church prayed to be faithful to their God-ordained opportunity to give witness to all that Jesus had done on their behalf. They asked God to give them the strength to continue to bring glory to God with their testimonies and their lives.

Consider how the recognition that God is in control might allow you to surrender your life to his purposes. Are you ready to pray for boldness amid the challenging circumstances of your life?

Saturday, March 4

After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly. Acts 4:31

The church had recognized the sovereign power of God and surrendered their lives to his purposes. They prayed for the boldness to give witness amid the pressure of the world. As a result of their surrender, the church was filled with the Holy Spirit. Because they were filled with the Spirit, they were able to speak the word of God with boldness. You might call this a “chain reaction” beginning with praise and resulting in the courage to speak about Jesus with confidence and conviction.

Ask God to set off this same “chain reaction” in you.

Wednesday, March 29

“The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’

“But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ So they began to celebrate. Luke 15:21-24

Richard Foster says, “The first step to the abundant life is an accurate assessment of our condition. Honesty leads to confession and confession leads to change.” You don’t have to worry or wonder if the forgiveness of God has limits. God stands ready to forgive your sin even if you have brought the same thing to him a thousand times before. When you agree with God about our sin, he is ready to listen and forgive. The blood of Jesus paid your debt, removing any reason for sin to hang as a shadow over your life.

Confession removes the barriers that Satan works to erect. If you really understood the value of confession, you would use every ounce of energy to bring your thoughts and actions out of the darkness and into the light. Confession pries open closed hearts and allows you to experience the promises of God. Confession pulls down the pretenses and binds your heart to your brothers and sisters in Christ in the way God intended you to live. Relationships resume. Broken lives become whole again. In response to the prodigal son’s confession, the forgiving father held a celebration. Confess your sins. Let’s get the party started today.

Confess your sins to God. Surrender to God the right to determine your own path. The Spirit will guide your decisions. By his grace, you have been set free to become the person God intends.

Tuesday, March 28

Then he told them many things in parables, saying: "A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. Whoever has ears, let them hear." Matthew 13:3-9

If you are like so many others, you want to devote time to prayer, but distractions keep you from hearing God.

In the parable of the four soils, Jesus explains the difference between merely hearing and really listening. You can hear God's Word with your ears but if the truth never penetrates the heart nothing about you will be any different. If you fill your time and your heart with possessions, career, or even family and friends, you will become like the thorny soil. The seed falls into the earth and begins to sprout, but the thorns take over and eventually choke the plant. Jesus invites you to remove the thorns (otherwise known as clutter) from your life to make space for his Word to grow.

A passionate walk with Christ isn't without sacrifice but it is worth any adjustment you must make. What distractions stand in the way of you spending consistent time with God?

Sunday, March 5

Prayer Focus this Week: Family

"Bring your father and your families back to me. I will give you the best of the land of Egypt and you can enjoy the fat of the land." Genesis 45:18 (NIV)

Our mission field starts with our families, those we spend the most time with, and the ones we love the most. Ironically, our families see us at our worst, when they actually deserve our best. Our best is when they are able to experience the love of Christ from us. When they do, we can bring the ones we love back to our Father in heaven.

Breath Prayer: Lord Jesus, I pray my family will know You as their Lord and Savior.

Opportunities for prayer, study, service, and fellowship:

- Discuss and practice with your family what love is, as found in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7. If you have little ones, make it into a fun game, then share with us how God is moving.
- Assemble Easter baskets for residents of PruittHealth, Tuesday, March 7th at 11:30 AM in Ford Hall. These baskets will be delivered to residents later in the month.
- Lectio Divina class for youth and adults, Wednesday, March 8th at 6:00 PM in Ford Hall.

Monday, March 6

Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

2 Corinthians 12:7b-10

The Apostle Paul prayed but he did not receive the answer he would have liked. The "thorn in the flesh" remained. He seems to understand that God is at work in his weakness. Pete Greig, church planter and the founder of the 24-7 prayer movement, has written extensively about prayer. He says that when we encounter times of unanswered prayer, we need to ask ourselves what God might be doing in our lives. There is a reason God is silent. Where is God revealing himself? What is he teaching us in this time? What does he want us to know about ourselves?

**How can your unanswered prayers become a source of insight?
What is the relationship between your unanswered prayers and your sanctification?**

Monday, March 27

On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee. As he entered a village, ten lepers approached him. Keeping their distance, they called out, saying, 'Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!' When he saw them, he said to them, 'Go and show yourselves to the priests.' And as they went, they were made clean. Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. He prostrated himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan. Then Jesus asked, 'Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they? Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?' Then he said to him, 'Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well.'
Luke 17:11-19

Faith will flourish in the rich soil of gratitude. As the ten lepers obeyed Jesus, they found themselves healed from leprosy – the disease which had controlled their lives and separated them from their homes and families and the rest of the world. Luke records that only one of the men returned to thank Jesus. The Master wondered aloud at the lack of gratitude of the other nine who were healed. Then he addressed the grateful man and said: "Get up and go on your way, your faith has made you well."

The man's faith, expressed through his gratitude was a conduit for a miracle. Since Jesus had already given the man physical healing at this point, he must have been speaking about something else. In some way, the gratitude of the Samaritan gave Jesus the opportunity to do an even greater work in his life.

Take the time to praise God for who he is and thank him for all that he has done for you and the ones you love. Consider how your expressions of gratitude might precede the miracle you desire.

Sunday, March 26

Prayer Focus this Week: Businesses and Co-Workers

For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. Ephesians 2:10 (NIV)

In the business world we can sometimes forget that our work and career focus is secondary to the fulfillment of God's kingdom work. Our workplaces can become a "seedbed" where we influence the lives of our colleagues. When we pray with and for our co-workers and business associates our workplaces will become a place of harvest for the kingdom of God.

Breath Prayer: Lord Jesus, this day, for these co-workers, I pray.

Opportunities for prayer, service, and fellowship:

- Plan a prayer time or prayer walk in your workplace, or you may choose to prayer walk around one business you patronize. Be creative! Then share with us how God is moving.
- Corporate Prayer Walk Opportunity: Tuesday, March 28th at noon, Meredyth Dr. Walking Path.
- Lectio Divina class for youth and adults, Wednesday, March 29th at 6:00 PM in Ford Hall.
- Deliver Easter bags to residents at PruittHealth, Thursday, March 30th. Contact Christy Winkel for details.
- Easter egg hunt at Northside Elementary, Friday, March 31st. Contact Christy Winkel for details.

Tuesday, March 7

Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you." Luke 6:38

Prayer and service cannot be separated from one another. To serve in meaningful ways will bring forth the awareness of your need to pray. You will be moved to compassion by your proximity to the needs of others, and you will also recognize your own limitations. The new awareness of the needs around you will move you to pray. As you pray, the Spirit will prompt you to serve. You will become the answer to the prayers that you pray.

Consider how prayer and service are connected in your experience. How are you serving others in the name of Jesus? How does this service cause your prayer life to deepen?

Wednesday, March 8

Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. Mark 1:35

Jesus withdrew from daily life activities to be alone with the Father and pray. Jesus' solitude and silence is a major theme in the Gospels. His ongoing, intimate relationship with his Father was the source of his compassion, wisdom, and power that we see on every page of the Gospel.

It's how he began his ministry.

It's how he made important decisions.

It's how he dealt with grief.

It's how he prepared for his death on the cross.

If Jesus needed time alone with his Father, we should expect to need similar times of solitude and silence in order to live a Christian life.

How do the daily rhythms of your life provide opportunity for you to commune with God?

Saturday, March 25

You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. Jeremiah 29:13

Dallas Willard says that Christians must learn to live as though Jesus is about to speak. "The reality of God's voice does not make seeking it unnecessary." When you look for something important you must leave "no stone unturned." When you seek God earnestly, you will go out of your way to examine anything that might be his overture to you, including looking in the obvious places like Bible verses and your own thoughts. You will look for him only if you believe that he has something to say to you and he wants to say it.

Choose a scripture passage to read and ask God what he is saying to you through his Word.

Friday, March 24

*Take delight in the Lord,
and he will give you the desires of your heart. Psalm 37:4*

Pastor Laurel describes how she learned about finding joy in prayer:
“When our three boys were young, we attempted a family devotional with them each evening before we put them to bed. It could be a sweet time of sharing. Most of the time, it was this strange juxtaposition — a kind of free-for-all punch and tussle backdrop to Bible stories and prayer. Every evening each of us said a sentence or two, thanking God for his gifts and asking for his protection and guidance for the day ahead. I will always remember when our full throttle two-year-old jumped to his feet and shouted out his prayer, “Dear Lord Jesus, the more fun we can have!”

We could debate my son’s syntax, but I’ve had years to reflect, and I think his theology was right on target. God wants you to be filled with joy when you think about him. He delights in you, and he wants you to delight in him as well. What a grand idea: have more fun — enjoy God more.”

Have you discovered that in relationships you often get what you expect? During this season of Lent, approach your time of prayer with great enthusiasm for all that God will reveal about himself and his great love for you.

Thursday, March 9

So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him. Acts 12:5

Peter’s life was on the line. He was held captive, chained between two guards. King Herod had recently murdered James so fear would have been a reasonable response. Although Peter was shocked when in the middle of the night his chains fall off, he did not run and hide. Miraculously, an angel of the Lord showed up at his side to guide him to safety. Eventually, he got out of town but first he chose to visit those brothers and sisters who had been praying together for his release. He stopped by Mary’s house to let them know that God heard and answered their prayers.

Luke, the writer of Acts, wants us to know that there is a vital connection between Peter’s deliverance and the prayers of the church. There are things that will happen in this world because Christians pray. God is sovereign, but God has determined that prayer will move his hand.

Prayer is the power of the church. In the history of the church, revival has never come because Christians put it on their calendar. The mighty outpouring of the Spirit is always the result of the persistent prayers of God’s people.

Think about your relationships with friends at church. Are there times and places where you could gather with other Christians to pray for spiritual renewal in our church and community?

Friday, March 10

Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. Romans 12: 2

There is no doubt about it. The world will influence your thinking and your thinking will guide your behavior unless you decide to do something different. You will take your cues from the world around you unless you choose to renew your mind. This renewal is an on-going process of spending time in God's Word. You choose to open yourself to the work of the Holy Spirit when you open the Scriptures and pray over what the Lord reveals to you as you read. There are many ways to incorporate this kind of reading and praying into your devotional life. For example, Lectio Divina has been practiced by Christians throughout the centuries. This is a way of praying the Word of God over your life so that God's truth and his promises guard your heart and guide your steps.

Take a moment now and ask God to renew your mind.

This year during the season of Lent, First Methodist is offering *The Lectio Course: How to Hear God by Praying the Bible*. This class will help you incorporate the ancient spiritual practice of Lectio Divina into your own devotional life. Join us on Wednesday nights at 6:00 PM and discover the richness of a mind renewed and a life directed by the Word of God. Led by Rev. Jim Morrow, The Lectio Course will equip you to grow in prayer, discern God's voice, and fall in love with the Bible.

If you are unable to attend the class, or if you want an additional resource, check out the free Lectio 365 app. Each day, you'll be guided through the practice of Lectio Divina. If you need help installing the app on your phone, contact the church office.

Thursday, March 23

If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. John 15:7-9

God intends for you to live the kind of life where you hear him speak and you speak to him. This relationship feels real and passionate, not distant and stuffy. When you arrange your life to prioritize prayer you will experience the same kind of amazing love that Jesus shared with his Father. You will find that there is really no end or beginning to prayer. Communication with God will follow you to your workplace, to the grocery store, and to the ballpark. You will live your prayers even when you aren't on your knees.

This journey of prayer is a process. Where do you begin? Start by telling God what you love. After all, every good and perfect gift comes from him. Then take the time to ask God what is important to him. What does he love? Ask him to help you learn to love those very same things. You will find that you begin to recognize the voice of God speaking to you throughout the day, because he is the one you have been hearing all along.

Wednesday, March 22

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. 2 Corinthians 5:17-21

God loves you with his perfect love. His deepest desire is to live in relationship with you. With his death on the cross, Jesus provided forgiveness for sin and reconciliation between God and humanity. The Spirit of God takes up residence in the lives of those who trust Jesus as their Savior. This is God's beautiful plan of redemption, which he established before he created the world.

The result of your redemption is that fellowship with God is possible. Prayer is the conduit for communication between you and God. Your unmet requests can cause you to become bitter and to withdraw from God, or these needs can cause you to press in deeper to the Father's heart. The Spirit will draw you closer to God as you continue to pray about the desires of your heart.

**How have your unanswered prayers drawn you closer to God?
How do you ensure that unanswered prayer does not cause you to lose your passion for God and your faith?**

Saturday, March 11

In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God. Romans 8:26-27

Sometimes the situation in front of you seems too big and you don't know what to pray. The circumstances are too painful or the consequences too great. You aren't even sure what you want to happen. All you know is that you need to hear from God. In times of doubt and indecision the best thing to do is this: jump into the fray and pray. The Holy Spirit will catch you and take you wherever you need to go. The Holy Spirit will align your prayer with the Father's will.

Consider keeping a prayer journal where you record both your praise and petition. When you don't know what to pray, tell God the problem. Surrender your will to the Holy Spirit. Often, you will be able to look back at your journal and see how God has answered your prayers — even when you didn't know what to pray.

Sunday, March 12

Prayer Focus this Week: Neighbors

“You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love. For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’” Galatians 5:13-14 (NIV)

God created us for community. We don't always get to choose who our neighbors are. We get along with some neighbors, but others challenge our patience and cause us to ponder the sacrificial love of Jesus. Jesus loves us so much that He gave His all that we might be in relationship with Him. One way we may love and serve our neighbors is by praying for them.

Breath Prayer: Lord Jesus, this day, I pray for my neighbors.

Opportunities for prayer, study, service, and fellowship:

- Take some time this week to take a prayer walk around your neighborhood. As you walk past each house pray God might touch these families with His love. Pray that you will meet a neighbor and personally share God's love with them.
- Join us for SEWN (Sunday Evening with Our Neighbors): In addition to dinner, we will offer communion and a time of worship, Sunday, March 12th, 4:30 – 5:30 PM in Ford Hall.
- Corporate Prayer Walk Opportunity: Tuesday, March 14th at noon, Tift Park (Meet by flagpole).
- Lectio Divina class for youth and adults, Wednesday March 15th at 6:00 PM in Ford Hall.

Tuesday, March 21

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:6-7

You can become discouraged in your prayer life when you seem to make requests that are not answered. Pete Greig says, “Your faith shrivels when you focus on your problems.” He suggests in his book **God on Mute** that you establish a rhythm of prayer. You make your requests to God, but you also take the time to focus on the beauty and power and majesty of God. You ask and you worship. You worship and you ask. As you celebrate the things that God has already done, you are reminded of his faithfulness to you. Your faith is encouraged, and your heart will rejoice because you have been reminded of the character of God.

Spend time thanking God for his blessings in your life. Consider keeping a gratitude journal as a part of your Lenten journal. How does rejoicing at all that God has done for you change your perspective on the things that normally produce stress or anxiety?

Monday, March 20

Moved with compassion, Jesus reached out and touched him. "I am willing," he said. "Be healed!" Mark 1:41 NLT

The tragedies of the world can seem overwhelming. The aftermath of natural disasters, the effects of violence and war, the socio-economic problems within your own community are communicated so constantly that you might find yourself wanting to look the other way.

It is helpful to understand that God does not intend for you to become personally involved with every person or situation. However, God does want you to care for others in some way. Andy Stanley says it so aptly, "Do for one what you wish you could do for everyone." This is as true for the way you pray as it is for the ministry you perform. How do you decide which need is yours to address? Which needs should you commit to faithful prayer?

We read in Scripture that Jesus was moved with compassion for the people he encountered. When your heart stirs with compassion, it is an indication from the Lord that this is a prayer project for you. There is an inner conviction that you should begin to pray for this person or circumstance. As you pray, you will experience the flow of the Holy Spirit confirming that this is where you should place your attention.

Monday, March 13

*"Come, all you who are thirsty,
come to the waters;
and you who have no money,
come, buy and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk
without money and without cost.*

*² Why spend money on what is not bread,
and your labor on what does not satisfy?
Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good,
and you will delight in the richest of fare.*

*³ Give ear and come to me;
listen, that you may live. Isaiah 55:1-3a*

In this passage, the prophet announces that God invites his people to come into relationship with him and be blessed. For this to happen, something is required. They must listen.

In his wonderful book **How to Pray: A Simple Guide for Normal People**, Pete Greig says that so many of our discussions about prayer focus on whether God hears and responds. Every now and then, it is good to evaluate your prayer life and consider whether you are doing all the talking. In prayer as in the whole salvation story, you are not the initiator. You are the one who hears and responds. God is reaching out to you, and it is up to you to listen carefully to all that he is saying.

Are you consciously listening to God?

Tuesday, March 14

You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.
Jeremiah 29:13

You may feel insignificant and wonder if God really will speak to you. You might assume that God has bigger things to accomplish and better people to use. But when you spend time listening to God, you will find that God is not put off by your problems or limitations. God loves you as you are. You should not doubt God's interest in you. Your Heavenly Father moves in your life and responds to your prayers, not because of who you are but because of who he is. Your prayers are always brought to God in the context of relationship with God. You can pray with honesty and vulnerability because you know that you are loved by your Creator.

Why is it difficult to be authentic in prayer? How does a growing knowledge of God's grace make it easier to be honest in your prayers?

Sunday, March 19

Prayer Focus this Week: Students

Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them —not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. 1 Peter 5:2-3 (NIV)

We have a God-given responsibility to care for and pray for our students. Some students do not have praying parents. We, the church, can advocate and intercede for them.

Breath Prayer: Lord Jesus, this day, for these students, I pray.

Opportunities for prayer, study, service, and fellowship:

- Pray for students and schools. If you take a student to school, take the opportunity to pull over and sit a moment to pray when you drop them off or pick them up. Pray for their well-being, their safety, wholesome friendships, godly character traits, wisdom, and that they would know their sense of purpose. Pray that they would know they are created in God's image, as well as whatever the Holy Spirit lays upon your heart. If you do not have a personal connection to a student, select a particular school and pray for those who attend.
- Lectio Divina class for youth and adults. Wednesday March 22nd at 6:00 PM in Ford Hall.

Saturday, March 18

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. Romans 8:28

Intercession begins with listening. Ask God for the wisdom to pray according to his will. Ask God to reveal to you how he is working in the person's life or the circumstance that you are concerned about. Over time, your prayers will become focused and timely. You will know how to pray for another because you have listened to God.

Make a list of people for whom you pray on a regular basis. Spend a few minutes asking God to show you his purposes for each person. Record any insight that God gives. Adjust your prayers to reflect God's will and notice how God's power is at work in your prayers.

Wednesday, March 15

*Praise the Lord, my soul;
all my inmost being, praise his holy name.
Praise the Lord, my soul,
and forget not all his benefits—
who forgives all your sins
and heals all your diseases,
who redeems your life from the pit
and crowns you with love and compassion,
who satisfies your desires with good things
so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.*
Psalm 103:1-5

Praise is the antidote to anxiety. When you incorporate praise into your prayers you take the focus off yourself. As you contemplate God's perfect love and faithfulness, his forgiveness and power you find peace. You will make your requests with confidence because you have taken the time to remember who God is.

You will find a list of the attributes of God at the end of this guide. Reflect on these in your times of worship. Consider how an awareness of who God is increases your faith and shapes your prayers.

Thursday, March 16

My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. John 10:27

The Christian life is not transactional. We don't work to please God in order to receive what he provides. Rather, our faith is based in a relationship with God, where we interact with God in listening and speaking. Dallas Willard explains in his book **Hearing God**, that this interaction is part of our friendship with God. As you seek to focus your mind on God, you will find that you have opportunity to interact with him on a moment-by-moment basis. You don't just "say" your prayers; you live them. Jesus said you will recognize his voice and follow him.

How will you know when Jesus is speaking to you in your everyday life?

Friday, March 17

Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly."
Matthew 11: 28-30 (The Message)

These are the words of Jesus spoken to people who were tired of jumping through hoops to earn God's approval. Life was hard and they were tired. Jesus looks at them with understanding and calls them to himself. In the same way, he is inviting you to spend time with him now. Keep company with Jesus and swap your anxiety for his peace. For a few moments, trade your frantic activity for his "unforced rhythms of grace." Even a few minutes a day with your Savior will give you the perspective you need.

Breathe in and breathe out. Let the Spirit of God calm your heart. Sit quietly with God in the morning and you will find that you are ready to face the challenges of the day with an awareness of his constant presence.

What might happen to your prayers if you began by slowing down your mind and relaxing your body in the presence of God?